

I firmly believe that when a Veteran is hurting, a family is hurting. And, that the reverse is true--when a Veteran is secure a family is secure. In these troubled economic times that notion is especially relevant.

We know that the severe recession our nation experienced in 1974 did much to complicate the return of so many of our Vietnam War Veterans. Unfortunately those young men and women came home not only to a struggling economy; they also received a lesser GI Bill than their fathers and had to navigate VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) unprepared to deal with the unique nature of that war and the changes to our society since the 1940s.

Our Pennsylvania Army National Guard 56<sup>th</sup> Stryker Brigade returns home this year from its largest deployment since World War II. When they left their jobs for the long preparations for that deployment, ours was a very different economy. They will come home to historically high rates of unemployment and an economy struggling to recover from a much more severe crisis than the 70's. As such, the time to prepare for their return is now.

There are more than 54,000 Veterans in the 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional district and more than 15 million nationwide. I am determined to see that each is aware of the benefits to which they are entitled and uses every one of them to full effect. Even today my office works with World War II and Korean War Veterans who fought in combat, but for a variety of reasons never enrolled in the VA Medical system following their service. Tragically, due to policy decisions of 2003 – while our nation was at war no less – hundreds of thousands of lower-income veterans were locked out of care they need and deserve. Their wives and children are invariably shocked that our government was so callous. And when that shock passes, they face the shared, multi-generational challenge of finding and paying for, the expensive care their loved one needs. Following our 2008 Veteran Summit, Chairman Filner and I worked to find \$375 million

to enroll some of these 'Priority 8' lower-income Veterans in the VA medical system – but more must be done.

I know there are Veterans of WWII, Korea and Vietnam similarly affected. We must redress that outrage and prevent this generation of Veterans and their families from suffering a similar fate. Especially today with health care costs such a burden and unemployment or underemployment eroding the stability of many families, the security of Veterans benefits are more important than ever. Beyond health care, competition for employment will be fierce for our returning Guardsmen and women. I want them, and their families, to understand how the 21<sup>st</sup> Century GI Bill, with its uniquely transferable benefits, can help them compete for and win the jobs that will offer them the purposeful life their service has earned them.